

Date: May 29, 1979

Occupation: Musician

INTERVIEWER: Can you remember when and how you first heard about Three Mile Island?

NARRATOR: Yes. I heard about it on the radio as I woke up in the morning, on Friday.

Her husband didn't pay much attention to it, but she was immediately concerned. What concerned her was the possibility of a disaster of "incredible proportions" (Notes).

INT: Did you talk about this at home?

NAR: Yes. And as a matter of fact we were leaving, my husband and I were leaving that afternoon for Washington with a class of students and it was his idea that rather than leave the children with friends of ours that we take them along with us. And I immediately saw the necessity of doing that. And so I, my whole afternoon was spent packing the children's clothes and getting us ready to in effect evacuate.

INT: To keep the family together?

NAR: Yes.

INT: You did some talking with coworkers, did you talk to others?

NAR: Not that much. I don't have that much contact with Dickinson professors, mostly with students, and I don't remember all that much conversation about it, until Friday. And it was mainly students I talked with and they seemed more concerned than the professors. Professors seemed to be taking the advice of the physicists, appeared calm. Where the students seemed a little more apt to go to the next step, which was to think that there might be a disaster.

INT: They were worried?

NAR: Some of them, I can't say the students, but the ones that I talked to seemed to be more worried.

INT: Did you follow more than usual newspapers, radio or TV?

NAR: Radio, yes.

INT: You were listening more?

NAR: I was listening to the radio.

INT: Do you remember what source?

NAR: What source?

INT: Do you remember what station you might have been listening to?

NAR: Well, I am very bad at that, I don't know what the stations are. I only listen to the classical music stations. And the PBS. For the news that I like, the *All Things Considered*. So I was kind of flipping around. I also turned on the TV while I was packing. And again I'm rather illiterate about what stations there are.

INT: So you were actually paying particular attention to sources which you would not ordinarily tap at all?

NAR: That's right.

INT: How did you feel about the media handling of the incident?

NAR: The more local programs were the least helpful...from my experience of flipping around. It seemed like the local stations, ah, trying to think back. I felt that I was getting better coverage from stations that were out of Philadelphia, New York.

INT: National?

NAR: Yes, national stations.

INT: Did you feel that they handled it well, responsibly?

NAR: I don't know that much about it. I do know that this physicist said that they were blowing it all out of proportions. I have to analyze the situation to know whether they were handling it responsibly. After all, there is a big difference between six inches and six feet of water. And if that's the kind of thing they were doing, then that wasn't responsible.

INT: Was there anyone in particular that you relied on?

NAR: Anyone in particular/

INT: Any person or either public personage or anyone that you found particularly reliable source of information?

NAR: No. I felt that I was totally at sea in this situation. And that caused a great deal of ambivalent feelings, because I felt that whatever I did might be inappropriate and might be appropriate at the same time. To leave seemed an appropriate response and yet it seemed an inappropriate response at the same time, and to stay was the same thing, and it was just weighing these, weighing these totally ambivalent feelings.

INT: For example leaving?

NAR: That was a very stressful condition I thought. This type of total ambivalence. If you know what I mean...

INT: Sure. You have conflicting feelings about what's going on. I was just gonna lead you in that direction. What made you feel that it might not be wise to leave?

NAR: If everyone were to up and leave, it would be a very bad situation and I was more willing to do it in an orderly way if we had to leave. Like leaving a theater, it's on fire, if everybody dashes for the doors, everybody will be killed, and I wanted it to be (unintelligible).

INT: You felt some sort of responsibility here to, I mean a kind of generalized social responsibility.

NAR: That's right. Yes. Definitely.

INT: Now then, what made you feel it was good to go?

NAR: What made me feel it was good to go was self-preservation. I thought that since we had the opportunity to go, and we had all this set up, that it would be foolish not to go, in a situation like this, as grave as this with such a danger.

INT: And there were other responsibilities here?

NAR: Other responsibilities here?

INT: Well, in terms of your deciding to go.

NAR: Well the other responsibility I thought of, were Carlisle to have been an evacuation center, there would have to be people to be around and administer to them. It looked as if our side of things would not be as affected as the closer areas or indeed the areas down wind. So I felt that kind of responsibility as well.

INT: And what's tugging at you is, then your dilemma has to do with getting your family out as opposed to meeting these other sources of responsibilities.

NAR: Yes, that's right.

INT: You did leave, for how long?

NAR: We left for essentially one night and one day. We went with the humanities class as scheduled. It was Friday afternoon, stayed over in a hotel, with our family smuggled into the hotel, and we came back very late Saturday night, to reassess the situation, see where we should go, and whether we should go.

INT: Did you make other plans?

NAR: Yes, we did.

INT: Can you tell me about them?

NAR: We had planned to go to my husband's parents in Rochester, they weren't even there, they're house would have been empty and we could have gone there very easily, Rochester, New York. We didn't ultimately go, and we were again in a situation of deciding whether to go or not. But we decided to go Sunday, during the day, and spent all day Sunday, even though we were very, very tired from our conflicting feelings, and our Washington trip. Also just not knowing the extent of the situation, and we packed up and thought we'd go that night at eight o'clock, but then friends of ours scoffed at us, and said, "You're not going to evacuate are you?" so we thought we'd wait until the morning.

INT: And that's what kept you here until Monday?

NAR: Yes. Well, also we were so tired. We were so tired.

INT: So it was less that you were reassured than that you were feeling strange with your friends saying, "Good gravy don't leave!"

NAR: Uhm hum.

INT: Then you stayed, and you didn't even go Monday.

NAR: Well, we decided to go Monday morning, and what changed our mind then was, as a matter of fact, we kept the children out of school because we were convinced we were going to go, was that Truman went to the office, that's my husband, and he found a note saying that the college, instead of being closed, which we assumed it was, was still open, it was only classes had been suspended, and the Dean said that he assumed that all personnel would stay anyway, and therefore he had an extreme sense of duty to the college.

INT: So he was feeling responsibility to stay because the college was staying open?

NAR: That's right, because the college was staying open. But I did not feel that, so I said, "Well, let's wait until noon," and that is when I really listened to the news. And things got better that morning, so that by noon it seemed not quite so bad.

INT: It seemed that things were better off over there, so you were reassured by that?

NAR: That's right.

INT: Do you think if you wanted to go that afternoon there would have been some serious conflict between you and Truman?

NAR: In the family? Yes, there would have been. And I'm not sure if I had the psychological energy to override his sense of duty to the college. But I was mad, I was good and angry at him. But the exhaustion was really bad from those days and days of build up to Monday morning. Actually Monday morning was the worst, and then it went down.

INT: When you thought about leaving, what did you want to take with you?

NAR: That was the most valuable thing about the whole experience. I realized what really was important to me, and that was only my family and the family pictures, and as many musical instruments as we could get out, but even then, you know, the ones I we couldn't get out I had no real basic feelings for. And a friend of mine suggested the silver...but that didn't mean anything to me, I realized that wasn't important at all.

INT: Did you ever pack those things?

NAR: Yes, as a matter of fact, I found that the family albums were instead of in albums were in boxes and I devoted myself to putting them in albums, which I still haven't finished! (laughter)

INT: Did you have any mental pictures of what was going on over at TMI or what might happen?

NAR: Mental pictures. Ah, well, they talked about a meltdown, and I certainly thought of a great deal of heat, and I had pictures of the nuclear blow up just like the testings.

INT: So you say a certain kind of explosion?

NAR: Yeah.

INT: What kind?

NAR: Just like the bomb test, with the mushroom shaped cloud, and all that. Is that what everybody's saying?

INT: Well, it's a common response, but I don't want to prompt you it.

NAR: But actually I didn't think that type of thing would happen as much as that radiation would be the problem, not an explosion, but radiation, so that's where my vision came in, that the radiation would be such that we would have to leave for thirty years. Everybody in the area, for quite wide area, I didn't have exactly the amount of area in mind. And then I visualized coming back thirty years later, and going to my mailbox and getting thirty year Dickinson College mail out, and seeing everybody else thirty years later, the gray hair and all that. And then coming back to the actual house,

with shredded curtains and animals having lived in it, and this is where I had a flashback of the film *Great Expectations*.

INT: Oh did you? Why was that?

NAR: Well, the house just looked very much like the way the table was set. I don't remember the movie that much, I saw it when I was about 12 years old, and it had a tremendous impact on me, seeing this wedding feast set up. Wasn't it a wedding feast? Some sort of table set up, and all the food was there and the glasses were there and the cobwebs, and the tablecloth was all shredded. Well the curtains looked a little bit like the tablecloth. Papers eaten, etcetera. Weird vision. But it was very vivid and I felt it was extremely well within the realm of possibility. I was accepting that that might happen.

INT: Is that what worried you most, that we might have to go away? If the worst had happened over there, is that what you thought...?

NAR: No that didn't, well, if the worst had happened, it would have been the whole eastern sea coast that would have been affected, because what really worried me the most, was that on Sunday I got a telephone call from a very good friend of mine in Philadelphia who had gotten a telephone call from a mutual friend of ours in Washington, whose living mate had been told to evacuate Washington and we both felt that we were in danger, she felt she was in danger and she was going to Kentucky. She was urging me to get out of there as fast as I could, and at that I felt that I had some special information, because the man who had been urged to leave Washington had done some investigating of nuclear industries by the PBS, and so we felt that he was in a position to know something that maybe no one else did know, and therefore if he was evacuating Washington, then we certainly should go too. That worried me the most, if the worst had happened it would have been unthinkable, I couldn't of thought about that. But this vision had kind of a local aspect to it. But say within a hundred miles or fifty miles, people wouldn't have been able to come back for thirty years.

INT: Do you think any thing that happened at TMI might have affected your health?

NAR: Well, when I went to the dentist last Wednesday and he said he wanted to take x-rays, I thought mmmmm, maybe I've had too much radiation, for the rest of my life even, and I ought to watch that. My reaction was interestingly to ask the question, "are you going to take x-rays of my children?" in which case I would have said "not on your life". But I did allow him to take x-rays of my mouth. Now here ambivalence, I play the flute, I have to have good teeth to play the flute, so I was weighting that against the x-rays, and I thought well, I've had my children, I'll risk the x-rays.

INT: That would suggest that you were thinking about something genetic?

NAR: Oh, definitely. Oh, I see what you mean. Yes, I guess the thing that most upset me were the genetic implications of all this, I noticed quite a difference between the reactions of middle aged men and younger men and women, women particularly. And

the older men, the ones who were past child bearing age, were scoffing at the reaction of people who had left, and I thought they missed one of the most significant aspects of this whole thing, namely that even if we felt that it was alright for ourselves to stay it might have implications for the future generations. Not only for our immediate families, which would be tragic, but for the whole area. I guess that upset me about as much as anything.

INT: So that's one of the things you thought health might be affected in terms of genetic anomaly and (unintelligible). Were there other health problems you thought of?

NAR: Certainly cancer. We won't know for thirty years exactly what has happened. And I think the people who say that now we know that nuclear accidents are safe are completely wrong, we won't know for maybe even fifty years. We won't know.

INT: Do you think there are other aspects of your life or the life of your community that may have been affected?

NAR: Well, we certainly saw that the everyday schedule of our lives might have to be suspended by some manmade, unknown power.

INT: Did you picture in your mind any affects of radiation apart from cancer?

NAR: No, and that was what was so upsetting, is because you can't really picture them in your mind, it's not immediate. We have people that are dying of cancer all the time all around us, and so just an increase in the incidences of cancer is not all that very immediate, and yet it's so related.

INT: Did you feel that those in charge were in control of the situation?

NAR: No.

INT: What made you uneasy?

NAR: Well, I just thought it was obvious that they had no idea how to meet the situation and what to do about it. This hydrogen bubble was scary, I don't even know if it existed now. [laughter]

INT: Did you think government officials handled things well?

NAR: Well, they were relying on information which was so incomplete and I suppose they handled it the best they could under the circumstances.

INT: What about Met Ed?

NAR: No. It's obvious when you have a business involved, they're going to put their business in the best light, doesn't matter whether it's an airlines that's just had a crash or what. I think that was a very unhealthy situation, and if we're going to have nuclear

power, we ought to have some disinterested party intimately involved in it, so we don't have that kind of sitting on the information.

INT: You felt they were sitting on it?

NAR: Yeah, I felt they were letting out what they had to let out, and no more.

INT: Do you think they're in control of the situation now?

NAR: No.

INT: Can you talk about that alittle. What makes you think not?

NAR: Well, you don't hear that much about it, but the last I heard there was still radiation being emitted, and I just...they still don't know what went wrong, they still haven't completely closed down the plant, they haven't gotten rid of the radioactive waste that came from this incident, and I'm uneasy about all of that. They were talking about letting it go into the Susquehanna, and jeopardize the whole eastern seaboard again, and I just don't trust anything they do. I don't think they know how to put this thing under control ultimately, I think the affects of this will be with us for many, many years and we're not even going to know it. Like those chemical companies who are just now being indicted for things they did I don't even know how many years ago, and they have been making so many people sick, and genetically deformed progeny, and it's just bad, I think we're going to see that.

INT: Did you think about God during the incident?

NAR: No.

INT: Did you pray?

NAR: No, I didn't see God as having anything to do with it, it was a manmade crisis. The only thing I would have prayed for was a king of generalized prayer for forgiveness for human depravity.

INT: Did this event bring any past experiences of yours to mind?

NAR: Well, possibly when as a very young child when we had bomb drills at school, and I had the same feeling of impending disaster and impending doom, and just terrific lack of faith in humanity, you know, and that kind of depression that human beings make situations where this is necessary.

INT: Did you think of any past historical events?

NAR: Can't think of any, no, except maybe war in general. Well, and of course the nuclear bombing of two Japanese cities.



INT: You've told me about your visual pictures, is that like a daydream?

NAR: Yeah.

INT: You were awake and all?

NAR: Oh yes.

INT: Did you have any others?

NAR: Other daydreams? Well, yes I dreamt, well daydreamt, that I would be separated from people in this evacuation, that I might never get in contact with good friends.

INT: Any other?

NAR: No, not that I can think of.

INT: Did you have any sleeping dreams that you can remember?

NAR: No, I can't remember any.

INT: Was your sleep disturbed at all?

NAR: Yes.

INT: Can you explain that?

NAR: Well, I would wake up periodically with a panic feeling.

INT: During the night you mean, you'd wake up?

NAR: Yes.

INT: Did you have trouble going to sleep?

NAR: Not too much, I was so stressfully tired, I was exhausted.

INT: Can you think of any other movies or TV shows beside the movies *Great Expectations* which you already spoke about?

NAR: Not that I can think of except, war movies and books where the unthinkable does happen. One of the main characters will get killed or something unthinkable will happen when you've built up your expectations and your love for a character and then it's knocked down. And that was the type of thing that was happening, in other words, you kind of live your life with expectations of the future, and then suddenly not only are the

expectations of the future just shattered, but there may be no future at all. You know, what are all the people going to do for jobs who evacuate, will we have a tremendous depression, and people starving, and people fighting each other for the resources that are left, assuming that all the people from Philadelphia and New York City and Washington go out into the countryside, that I did worry about.

INT: Did you find yourself singing any songs or thinking of any particular music?

NAR: I can't recall any.

INT: Did the people around you change tremendously?

NAR: Do you mean like my family or...?

INT: Well, them and your friends. Did you notice a change in behavior?

NAR: Well, my son whom we took to Washington, the older one, was absolutely furious, crushed, shattered, that we had done that to him because he had a party that night and he had a hike that he wanted to go on the next day, and he threatened and said "I'll never forget this, I'll never forgive you", but we took him anyway.

INT: And has he forgiven you?

NAR: Yes, as soon as we got back, he completely changed his tune and I think that he had changed in perhaps his attitude that maybe he does once in a while have to go along with what his mother and father have to say, that there are conditions under which his desires should be overridden.

INT: Do you think the incident changed you in any lasting way?

NAR: Any lasting way? I think it has to have changed me. I think it's a ...we've been rather childish in this country about wanting people to take care of us, wanting businesses to take care of us, kind of idealistic, I think this has shown a lot of us that we really have to grow up and not allow power companies or governments to do things like that. And it puts a terrific responsibility on us, and I'm not sure if I can act, I can act, I've got the disillusionment, and I guess the desire to act about it too.

INT: Have you developed an opinion about our using nuclear power?

NAR: Yes, I'm absolutely totally opposed! And I wasn't before.

INT: So before were you neither for or against it, or were you for it? You didn't have any position and now you have one?

NAR: I thought that it was very dangerous, but I just assumed that the technology could be developed to make it safe, but I'm absolutely convinced that that will never be the case.

INT: So we should get rid of nuclear power plants?

NAR: Yes.

INT: Did you hear any joking about the incident?

NAR: Well, the t-shirts.

INT: The ones around campus?

NAR: Yes.

INT: Anything else? Any posters or graffiti or anything?

NAR: Not much that I can think of. I will tell you one thing that happened last week though, that really jolted me, I don't know if it's, I haven't assessed the significance or not. I went to visit this same friend in Philadelphia and stayed over in the room, where an antique platter, small square platter, and a salt shaker to match. Obviously at one time there had been a pepper shaker too, and it was just beautiful, but the salt shaker was the same shape as one of the stacks at Three Mile Island and my reaction to that was almost violent (laughter). It looked like a cooling tower. Here's this beautiful porcelain object about six inches high and I just wanted to smash it. [laughter]

INT: Your esthetic has changed in terms of imagery?

NAR: Yes.

INT: Is there anything else you'd like to tell me about all this?

NAR: I can't think of anything now. (pause) I have noticed that people have tended to stop talking about it, but I don't think that this means that it's not still affecting people, and I'm glad to see you still interviewing people about this, because I think we have to work it out more than we have. It was so stressful at the time, and we got a certain amount of working out of it done, but I think there's a lot more that people aren't really confronting.

INT: Anything more?

NAR: Well, I have noticed when I've traveled away from Carlisle, people are very curious about what went on and how we reacted.

INT: When they find out you're from the area?

NAR: That's right, and what we think about nuclear power and all these things. In other words, they're relying on us as sort of experts.

INT: That's sort of disarming?

NAR: Yes! It's as if we have a responsibility now, we're kind of involved in the world pot of opinion on nuclear power, so in other words, we have a sort of duty to keep up on this, and have informed opinions, and I think we have a lot of clout.

INT: That very well may be true, important for us to talk.

NAR: That's right.

INT: Anything else?

NAR: I can't think of any more.

(Here they seem to go back to the question of what did you take with you when you left.)

NAR: When we went to Washington, I took my most valuable musical instruments, two eighteenth century flutes, and my only valuable jewels I have, only semiprecious stones but still. So I did take my valuables when I left, when I went to Washington, and I carried them all around Washington. (laughter).